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Does the Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos* breed in the Philippines?

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On 5 July 1975 I saw a pair of Pied Harriers *Circus melanoleucos* in the rolling cogon grasslands (*Imperata* sp.) east of Laguna de Bay along the road from Tanay, Rizal, to Siniloan, Laguna Province, Luzon. The male was in full adult plumage and the two birds executed an apparent aerial food-pass, though no actual prey exchange could be confirmed. After the birds separated neither landed within view. All my other records of this species from the Philippines are from October to February inclusive.

Parkes (1973) considered an August record of Lint and Stott (1948) to be unusually early, citing Brown and Amadon (1968). The timetable of migration given by the latter authors agreed with that of Smythies (1953) for Burma and with my own experience in Thailand, but adequate data on the seasonal occurrence of the species in the Philippines has not been published.

The species has nested in Burma – in April/May in a grassy plain south of Myitkyina – and may do so regularly in small numbers (Smythies 1953). Brown and Amadon (1968) underlined that breeding in Burma, in the south of its range, is six to eight weeks earlier than in the north. Hence one might expect records in the Philippines as late as May to be northern migrants, and for these to have returned by August would indeed be unusually early.

M. LeCroy (*in litt.*) has revealed the existence of a skin from Mindoro collected on 30 July 1963, and additional evidence of 'oversummering' is to be found in the manuscript notes of E. A. Mearns held by the United States National Museum (USNM). Much of his information was gathered in Mindanao and he found *C. melanoleucos* there in every month except July and December. Many of his records were from 'the broad sweep of cogonal country extending from the Serenaya Marsh

to the upper Libungan River east of Cotabato' and the Lake Lanao basin, and here in 1904 there were 'many' on 12 and 13 March, the species was 'noted' from 3 to 10 April and 'some were seen' on 28 and 29 May. His notes also say: 'At Tagulaya, on the west shore of the Gulf of Davao, June 14, 1904, I noted "The black and gray harrier is here in abundance upon the cogonals; but I saw none to-day"'. This implies sightings within the preceding few days since a chronological review of his collecting places him in that area only after 11 or 12 June. He also recorded the species from the 'base of Mt. Mayon, Tobacco side, Albay Province, Luzon' on 4 and 5 June 1907.

In summary there seems to be good evidence of occurrence throughout the year (although no doubt northern migrants augment the population in winter) and in habitat entirely suitable for breeding. The apparent food-pass described above is suggestive, but obviously formal evidence of breeding has yet to be found.

Dr. George Watson (USNM) was good enough to provide copies of Mearns's notes and Mary LeCroy details of the July specimen in the American Museum of Natural History.

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